

Errors of the Eight Schools

VOLUME nine of *The Annotations on "The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra"* states: "If the provisional has not yet been opened up and the true revealed, then the Dharma body and the reward body are not present in the provisional Buddha.¹ But if the true has already been revealed, then all three bodies are present in both the true Buddha and the provisional Buddha."

And volume nine of *The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra* says: "The Buddha consistently possesses the three bodies throughout the three existences. But in the various teachings [other than the Lotus Sutra], he kept this secret and did not transmit it."

[Diagram](#)

Buddha

living beings

Thus Come One of the Dharma body	innate Buddha nature
Thus Come One of the reward body	the wisdom to perceive it
Thus Come One of the manifested body	good deeds to develop this wisdom

[Diagram](#)

Buddha nature of living beings

Presence or absence of the Buddha nature is not discussed in the Hinayana sutras.

The Flower Garland, Correct and Equal, Wisdom, and Mahāvairochana sutras teach that living beings from the beginning possess an innate Buddha nature, but not the wisdom to perceive it or good deeds to develop this wisdom.

The Lotus Sutra teaches that living beings from the beginning possess all three inherent potentials of the Buddha nature.

Volume ten of *Words and Phrases* states: “The innate Buddhahood (the proper nature of the Dharma body) pervades both the original state of living beings and their temporary manifestation. The seeds of the wisdom to perceive it and of the good deeds to develop this wisdom are also present in the original state. They are not acquired for the first time at a later stage.”

Diagram

The second volume of the Lotus Sutra states:

“But now this threefold world is all my domain.”² the World-Honored One as sovereign and ruler of the nation

“And the living beings in it are all my children.” as father

“Now this place is beset by many pains and trials. I am the only person who can rescue and protect others.” as teacher

Diagram

The “Life Span” chapter states: “I am the father of this world.”

sovereign and ruler of the nation ↔ Thus Come One of the reward body

teacher ↔ Thus Come One of the manifested body

parent ↔ Thus Come One of the Dharma body

The Treatise of Five Hundred Questions states: “If a son does not even know how old his father is, he will also be in doubt as to what lands his father presides over. Though he may be idly praised for his talent and ability, he cannot be counted as a son at all!” And it also says: “He may perhaps have talent enough to govern one land, yet he does not even know how old his father and mother are.”

The Critical Essays on Buddhism and Taoism Ancient and Modern (written by Tao-hsüan) states: “In the age before the Three Sovereigns there was no writing. People knew only who their mother was and did not know who was their father. They were the same as birds and beasts.” (From the words of reproval addressed by the Dharma Teacher Hui-yüan to Emperor Wu of the [Northern] Chou dynasty³)

[Diagram](#)

Dharma Analysis Treasury school

Establishment of Truth school

take Shakyamuni to be their exclusive object of devotion. But they know him only in his manifested body.

Precepts school

[Diagram](#)

Flower Garland school

Three Treatises school

take Shakyamuni as their object of devotion. But they regard his Dharma body as without beginning and without end, his reward body as with beginning but without end, and his manifested body as with beginning and with end.

Dharma Characteristics school

[Diagram](#)

True Word school

takes Mahāvairocana Thus Come One as its exclusive object of devotion.

Regarding him, there are two opinions:

- (1) That Mahāvairocana Thus Come One is the Dharma body of Shakyamuni.

- (2) That Mahāvairochana Thus Come One is not the Dharma body of Shakyamuni.

However, the Mahāvairochana Sutra makes clear that Mahāvairochana Thus Come One is Shakyamuni Buddha. The assertion to the contrary is an erroneous view originating with later scholars of the True Word school.

Diagram

Pure Land school takes Amida Thus Come One as its exclusive object of devotion.

The seven schools listed above, the True Word school and the others, along with the Pure Land school, all fail to recognize Shakyamuni Thus Come One as their father. They resemble the persons in China living before the time of the Three Sovereigns who, like birds and beasts, did not know who their own father was. Among birds, neither the tit or wren nor the phoenix know their own father, and among beasts, neither the rabbit nor the lion know their own father. And in the time before that of the Three Sovereigns, neither great kings nor lowly commoners knew who their own father was.

The Mahayana schools other than the Tendai school, the True Word school and the others are comparable to the lion or the phoenix, and the Hinayana schools are comparable to tits and wrens or to rabbits. None of them know who their own father is.

In the Flower Garland school, the doctrines of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds and of three thousand realms in a single moment of life are found in the commentary on the Flower Garland Sutra by Ch'eng-kuan.

In the True Word school, the doctrines of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds and of three thousand realms in a single moment of life are set forth in the commentary on the Mahāvairochana Sutra [by Shan-wu-wei].

One may then ask how these doctrines agree with or differ from the same doctrines as they are propounded in the Tendai school. Before T'ien-t'ai's teachings came into existence, were the doctrines of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds and of three thousand realms in a single moment of life ever propounded?

Volume three of *On "The Words and Phrases"* states: "If we gather together all the various commentaries and examine them, we find that, whether they are schools of the one vehicle or schools of the three vehicles, they all agree that beings in these vehicles all possess the ten factors, namely, appearance, nature, and so forth. Why then do they not go on to say that beings in the six lower paths also possess the ten factors?"⁴

(If we go by this passage of commentary, it means that the scholars of Buddhism or Tripitaka masters who appeared in the five hundred years or more before the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai, and who put their faith in the Lotus Sutra, did not set forth the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life.)

Question: Is the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life employed in the Flower Garland school? (The Flower Garland school was founded in the time of Empress Wu [624–705] of the T'ang dynasty.)

Answer: Volume thirty-three of the commentary [on the Flower Garland Sutra] by Ch'eng-kuan (the Teacher of the Nation Ch'ing-liang) states: "Volume five of *Great Concentration and Insight*, in the section describing the ten meditations, lists the second type as 'meditation to arouse the true mind of enlightenment.' In explaining this, one should note that the arousal of the mind in beings of superior and inferior capacity described in this sutra [the Flower Garland Sutra] is profound and vast in word and meaning. Here T'ien-t'ai is referring to it in summary form, and this therefore constitutes proof that he subscribes to this doctrine."⁵

And volume twenty-nine of the same work says: "T'ien-t'ai, referring to the passage in the Lotus Sutra that states, 'The true aspect of all phenomena can only be understood and shared between Buddhas,' explains that this refers to the three thousand realms. The T'ien-t'ai school defines this teaching as the truth. The doctrines of that school, on matters of principle, do not disagree in any way with those of our [Flower Garland] school."⁶

The Flower Garland Sutra says: (In the old translation these words are spoken by Bodhisattva Forest of Merits; in the new translation they are spoken by Bodhisattva Forest of Awakening; and in *The Annotations on "Great Concentration and Insight"* they are quoted as the words of Bodhisattva Thus Come One Forest.⁷) "The mind is like a skilled painter, who creates various forms made up of the five components. Thus of all the phenomena throughout the entire world, there is not a single one that is not created by the mind. The Buddha is the same in nature as the mind, and living beings are the same in nature as the Buddha. The mind, the Buddha, and all living beings—these three are without distinction. . . . If one wishes to understand all the Buddhas of the three existences of past, present, and future, one should contemplate this truth: it is the mind that creates all the Thus Come Ones."

The Lotus Sutra states: (This passage is the concise replacement of the three vehicles with the one vehicle. The Buddha himself is speaking.) “This reality consists of the appearance, nature, entity, power, influence, internal cause, relation, latent effect, manifest effect, and their consistency from beginning to end.”⁸

And it also says: “The Buddhas, the World-Honored Ones, appear in the world for one great reason alone. . . . The Buddhas, the World-Honored Ones, wish to open the door of Buddha wisdom to all living beings.”⁹

The Lotus Meditation Sutra says: “Take faith in the mind of original enlightenment, the Dharma body, which dwells eternally on the mind lotus dais of the wonderful Law. The thirty-seven honored ones (the thirty-seven honored ones of the Diamond Realm mandala), from the beginning endowed with the virtues of the three bodies, abide in the mind citadel.¹⁰ The mind king is Great Sun Universally Shining Venerable One [Mahāvairochana], and the mind’s functions are the Thus Come Ones numerous as Ganges sands. This mind, without carrying out any practice to create causes and effects, is by nature endowed with doctrines numerous as dust particles, all various meditations, and boundless seas of virtue, complete and perfect from the beginning. Return to it, bow down to these Buddhas within the mind.”

The Buddha Treasury Sutra states: “The Buddha sees the Thus Come Ones seated in cross-legged position within the minds of all living beings.”¹¹

Question: Is the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life employed in the True Word school?

Answer: *The Commentary on the Meaning of the Mahāvairochana Sutra* (Shan-wu-wei, Chin-kang-chih, Pu-k’ung, I-hsing)¹² states: (There are five versions of this text. The version in ten volumes was not seen by Dengyō or Kōbō, as it was brought to Japan by Chishō.) “This sutra is the secret treasure of the Dharma King—do not show it to mean and unworthy persons! Shakyamuni appeared in the world, and after forty and more years, because Shāriputra three times earnestly requested him to do so, he proceeded to give a summary explanation of the doctrines of the Lotus Sutra.¹³ In similar fashion now Mahāvairochana, the Buddha body in its original state, embodies the most profoundly secret truth of the Lotus Sutra.

“The ‘Life Span’ chapter [of the Lotus Sutra] says: ‘Constantly I have dwelled on Holy Eagle Peak and in various other places. . . . My pure land is not destroyed, yet the multitude see it as consumed in fire.’ This expresses the meaning of the yoga¹⁴ of this [True Word] school. Because Bodhisattva Maitreya, who will succeed Shakyamuni as the next Buddha, three times earnestly requested him to do so, the Buddha preached these words [of the ‘Life Span’ chapter].”

The same work also says: “The school based on this sutra in its scope brings together all the teachings of the Buddhas. When it declares that all phenomena are nothing other than the temporary combination of the five components and therefore are without self, that they come forth as the mind transcending the worldly realm, which dwells in the midst of the five components, it is summing up the three divisions of the canon of the various Hinayana schools. When it declares that by meditating on the ālaya-consciousness of the components one may come to realize that one’s mind has from the beginning never undergone birth, it is summing up the doctrines of the eight consciousnesses, the three modes of existence,¹⁵ and the absence of intrinsic nature expounded in the sutras. When it speaks of the mind that perceives the complete absence of self [intrinsic nature]¹⁶ or the ten similes for the condition-born,¹⁷ it is summing up all the various kinds of marvelous environments described in the Flower Garland Sutra and the Wisdom sutras—all are contained therein. When it states that ‘to understand one’s own mind as it truly is’¹⁸ means to possess the Buddha wisdom to understand both the universal and individual aspects of phenomena, then the Buddha nature (the Nirvana Sutra), the one vehicle (the Lotus Sutra), and the secret treasury of the Thus Come One (the Mahāvairochana Sutra) are all contained therein. Thus all the essential elements of the various sacred words of the Buddhas are summed up in it.”

And volume seven of *The Annotations on the Mahāvairochana Sutra* (which was seen by Dengyō and Kōbō) states: “When it says that the recitation of the sutra of the T’ien-t’ai school is the same as the breath-counting meditation of the teaching of perfect and immediate enlightenment—this is what it means.”

Volume twenty-seven of *The Sung Dynasty Biographies of Eminent Priests*, the biography of Han-kuang, states: “Emperor Tai-tsung revered Han-kuang as though the latter were Pu-k’ung himself. (The True Word teachings were introduced to China in the reigns of Emperor Hsüan-tsung and Emperor Tai-tsung. Han-kuang was a disciple of the Tripitaka Master Pu-k’ung.) The emperor commanded Han-kuang to go to Mount Wu-t’ai and conduct religious practice there.

“At that time Chan-jan (Miao-lo, the sixth patriarch of the T’ien-t’ai school), a scholar of the T’ien-t’ai school, had mastered the meditation techniques and gained a profound understanding of the teachings of [T’ien-t’ai] Chih-che. Once he had gone with some forty or more priests from the Yangtze and Huai River region on a journey to the area of Ch’ing-liang.¹⁹ There he met Han-kuang and questioned him about the propagation of the Buddhist teachings in the western lands.

“Han-kuang replied that he had met a monk in one of the western lands who had mastered the doctrines of the school of non-substantiality and who questioned him about Chih-che’s teachings. ‘I have heard,’ said the Indian monk, ‘that his teachings draw the line between the correct and the erroneous,

illuminate the difference between what is partial and what is perfect, show how to carry out concentration and insight, and are of the utmost effectiveness.’ Two or three times the monk begged Han-kuang, saying, ‘If you should have occasion to come this way again, I hope for our sake you will bring these Chinese writings and translate them into Sanskrit—I very much desire to have them!’ Again and again he pressed Han-kuang’s hand and repeated his request.

“It may be noted that at that time in southern India there were many persons who subscribed to the teachings of Nāgārjuna. That is why this monk was anxious to have the doctrines of T’ien-t’ai [in India].”

Volume three of *The Treatise on the Meaning of the Mind Aspiring for Enlightenment* states: “The Revered I-hsing was originally a meditation master of the one-practice meditation²⁰ of the T’ien-t’ai school. He had mastered the complete and perfect doctrines of the T’ien-t’ai school. Therefore all the words and ideas that he expounded tend to agree with those of T’ien-t’ai.

“When Han-kuang, a disciple of the Tripitaka Master Pu-k’ung, went to India with his teacher, a monk of India questioned him, saying, ‘I have heard that in your country there are the teachings of T’ien-t’ai and that these are highly effective. If they deserve to be followed, then could you not translate them and bring them here for us?’

“The ideas put forth by the Tripitaka Master Pu-k’ung also agree with those of T’ien-t’ai. Recently there was an āchārya who said, ‘If you want to study the True Word doctrines, you should study those of T’ien-t’ai at the same time!’ All the monks were enraged at this.”

Question: Does the Flower Garland Sutra make clear the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life?

Answer: [The Flower Garland Sutra says], “The mind, the Buddha, and all living beings—these three are without distinction.” Volume one of *Great Concentration and Insight* states: “The mind of a single moment is without length, without breadth, an inconceivable thing. And this is true not only of oneself. The Buddha and living beings are the same. The Flower Garland Sutra says, ‘The mind, the Buddha, and all living beings—these three are without distinction.’ Thus one should understand that one’s own mind possesses all the [Buddha’s] teachings.”

Volume one of *On “Great Concentration and Insight”* states: “T’ien-t’ai here quotes the passage from the Flower Garland Sutra as proof that the principle is the same. Therefore the Flower Garland Sutra, extolling the mind of the first stage of security in bodhisattva practice, says, ‘The Buddha is the same in nature as the mind, and living beings are the same in nature as the Buddha. The mind, the Buddha, and all living beings—these three are without

distinction. The Buddhas understand that all phenomena are brought into being through the mind. If one can really come to understand in this manner, then that person has truly seen the Buddhas. The body is not the mind, and the mind is not the body. It [the mind] can perform all the works of a Buddha at will and in the most marvelous manner. If one wishes to understand all the Buddhas of the three existences of past, present, and future, one should contemplate this truth: it is the mind that creates all the Thus Come Ones.'

"But if one does not understand the meaning of the various passages on the perfect principle of our [T'ien-t'ai] school, then the principle behind this verse passage from the [Flower Garland] sutra will be truly difficult to fathom."

Diagram

Tripitaka teaching the four Āgama sutras of the Hinayana teaching

Explains that the mind produces the six paths but does not make clear that the mind possesses all six paths.

Connecting teaching Mahayana teaching

Explains that the mind produces the six paths but likewise does not make clear that the mind possesses them all.

Specific teaching the Ten Worlds within ordinary understanding

explains that the mind produces the Ten Worlds but does not make clear that the mind possesses all Ten Worlds.

Perfect teaching the perfect teaching of the sutras preached before the Lotus Sutra, such as the Flower Garland Sutra

The perfect teaching of the Lotus Sutra

Explains the doctrine of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds that is beyond ordinary understanding.

Volume five of *Great Concentration and Insight* states: “The Flower Garland Sutra says, ‘The mind is like a skilled painter, who creates various forms made up of the five components. Thus of all the phenomena throughout the entire world, there is not a single one that is not created by the mind.’ The ‘various forms made up of the five components’ referred to here are the five components of the Ten Worlds mentioned earlier.”

And it also says, “The five components of the Ten Worlds means that each of the five components is endowed with the ten factors, namely, appearance, nature, entity, power, influence, internal cause, relation, latent effect, manifest effect, and their consistency from beginning to end.”

And it also says, “Life at each moment is endowed with the Ten Worlds. At the same time, each of the Ten Worlds is endowed with all Ten Worlds, so that an entity of life actually possesses one hundred worlds. Each of these worlds in turn possesses thirty realms,²¹ which means that in the one hundred worlds there are three thousand realms. The three thousand realms of existence are all possessed by life in a single moment.”

Volume five of *On “Great Concentration and Insight”* states: “Therefore the Great Teacher [T’ien-t’ai], in his writings on mind contemplation such as *The Mind-Perceiving Meditation*, *Contemplation of the Mind and Method of Eating*, *The Method of Sutra Recitation*, and *The Essentials of Concentration and Insight*, only made clear the method for contemplation of the self-produced and externally-produced minds as a way of understanding the doctrine of the three aspects of temporary existence.²² But he did not as yet explain that a single moment of life possesses the three thousand realms.

“Again, in his *Treatise on the Observation of the Mind*, he uses the thirty-six questions to define the nature of the four kinds of mind,²³ but he does not touch on the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life. Only in his *Four Meditations*, he refers briefly to the Ten Worlds as they relate to observation of the mind.

“Thus, when at last he revealed the method of meditation in *Great Concentration and Insight*, he at the same time employed the ‘three thousand realms’ as a way to understand. This principle is the ultimate revelation of his final and supreme teaching. That is why Chang-an states in his introduction [to *Great Concentration and Insight*], ‘*Great Concentration and Insight* reveals the teaching that T’ien-t’ai Chih-che himself practiced in the depths of his being.’ He had good reason for saying this. I hope that those who read this work and seek to understand it will not allow their minds to be distracted by anything else.”

Volume five of *Great Concentration and Insight* states: “These ten meditations are all-encompassing in scope, subtly and keenly effective. First one

concentrates on determining the truth or falsity of the objects of meditation; then one carries out the correct practice, and the supplementary practices if these are needed; and in the end one attains the level of security and non-attachment. Perfect in intent, skillful in method, this procedure is complete and all-embracing, a guideline for the beginner in practice. The practitioner proceeds through the various steps until he has reached the level of sarvajnatā²⁴ (the first stage of security).

“This is not something that can be understood by meditation masters with their ignorance of correct doctrine or by Dharma teachers who merely recite texts. In effect, what the Thus Come Ones strove over countless kalpas to achieve; the wonderful enlightenment gained by them in the place of practice; that which Shāriputra three times begged the Buddha to reveal; that which was set forth in the three cycles of preaching—this is precisely what is contained within this [method of meditation].”

Volume five of *On “Great Concentration and Insight”* states: “The sixteen views regarding existence and nonexistence set forth in the four teachings,²⁵ the eight teachings expounded by the Buddha throughout the course of his lifetime, are encompassed herein. All are now opened up and made clear, gathered together into the one vehicle, which embraces all the various sutras, brought to completion in a single truth. Under the present circumstances, even the Buddhas of the partial teachings cannot understand [these ten meditations], much less persons²⁶ in the world today who are ignorant of correct doctrine. . . .

“The passage that begins, ‘In effect, what the Thus Come Ones strove over countless kalpas to achieve’ sings their praises. These ten meditations are set forth on the basis of the Lotus Sutra. Therefore T’ien-t’ai turns back to the text of the sutra and employs it to praise them.

“If one goes by the theoretical teaching, then one turns to [the seventh chapter of the sutra, which describes] the time of the Buddha Great Universal Wisdom Excellence and how Shakyamuni carried out religious practice for ‘countless kalpas’ and finally in the place of practice [under the bodhi tree] achieved ‘wonderful enlightenment.’ And if one goes by the essential teaching, then one returns to [the passage where the Buddha says] ‘originally I practiced the bodhisattva way,’²⁷ and explains how he continued to practice for ‘countless kalpas’ until he in fact attained original Buddhahood,²⁸ achieving ‘wonderful enlightenment.’ Thus the theoretical teaching and the essential teaching are both saying that one should simply seek to practice these ten meditations and attain enlightenment.

“In the passage regarding Shāriputra and the others, the Buddha, having attained enlightenment in the place of practice, wished to expound what he had awakened to. But he realized that the capacities of his listeners were not

yet of a suitable level, and he feared that [unable to believe his words] they would fall into the realm of suffering. Therefore he resorted to expedient means, over a period of forty and more years seeking in various ways to mature the understanding of his listeners.

“Then, at the assembly where he expounded the Lotus Sutra, he for the first time began in a summary way to cast off the view set forth in the provisional teachings. At that time, Shāriputra started to question his previous assumptions and to entertain doubts, and he three times earnestly begged the Buddha to reveal the truth. Then five thousand overbearing arrogant persons rose from their seats and withdrew, and after that the assembly was free of branches and leaves.²⁹

“Then the Buddha revealed that the four elements of teaching, practice, person, and principle are all incorporated in the one Buddha vehicle, describing the teaching method of the five categories of Buddhas and preaching the Law for those who could be called persons of superior capacity.

“But because the persons of intermediate capacity could not understand what he was saying, he employed similes and parables to convey this meaning. And because persons of inferior capacity were still hindered by faulty understanding, he explained to them in terms of their past relationship with him.

“The Buddha’s intentions were far-reaching, embodied in these ten meditations. Therefore, at the end of his discussion of the ten meditations, T’ien-t’ai likens them all to the great carriage.³⁰

“From this it is apparent that his remarks are meant to refer to the Lotus Sutra. But deluded persons fail to realize this and insist that they pertain to the Flower Garland Sutra. They merely see that the Flower Garland Sutra speaks of the teaching of perfect and immediate enlightenment, and are blind to the fact that this sutra belongs to the category of those that expound the perfect teaching in conjunction with the specific teaching.

“They completely fail to perceive the absolute viewpoint of the Lotus Sutra [from which all other sutras are opened up and merged with the Lotus], overlooking its significance as the sole revelation of the wonderful teaching and relegating it instead to a lesser position. But if one truly understands the passages on the theoretical teaching and the essential teaching and grasps the doctrine pertaining to the five periods of the Buddha’s preaching life, one cannot fail to see that the Lotus Sutra represents the most perfect of all teachings. How could there be any doubt? Therefore at the end of his remarks, T’ien-t’ai says, ‘This is precisely what is contained within this [method of meditation].’”

The same work [the fifth volume of *On "Great Concentration and Insight"*] also states: "T'ien-t'ai first quotes the passage from the Flower Garland Sutra because he is discussing the nature of the various objects of meditation. He wishes to show that the concept of 'creation by the mind' described in the above passage is the same as that of 'mind endowment' in his own discussion [of the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life]. Therefore he quotes the Flower Garland Sutra as proof of the validity of his concept of mind endowment.

"In volume eighteen of the Flower Garland Sutra, in the verse passage spoken by Bodhisattva Forest of Merits, we read: 'The mind is like a skilled painter, who creates various forms made up of the five components. Thus of all the phenomena throughout the entire world, there is not a single one that is not created by the mind. The Buddha is the same in nature as the mind, and living beings are the same in nature as the Buddha. The mind, the Buddha, and all living beings—these three are without distinction. . . . If one wishes to understand all the Buddhas of the three existences of past, present, and future, one should contemplate this truth: it is the mind that creates all the Thus Come Ones.'

"But if one does not understand T'ien-t'ai's passage on the three thousand realms in a single moment of life, then how can one make any sense of the Flower Garland Sutra when it says, 'Thus of all the phenomena throughout the entire world, there is not a single one that is not created by the mind. . . . The mind, the Buddha, and all living beings—these three are without distinction?'"

In judging the correctness or incorrectness of the teachings of the eight schools, one should examine them with this criterion in mind [namely, whether or not they reveal the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life].

With my deep respect,

Nichiren

The eighteenth day of the second month

Background

Nichiren Shonin wrote this work, dated the eighteenth day of the second month in 1272, during his exile on the island of Sado to Toki Jōnin in Shimōsa Province. In it he compares the doctrines of the Tendai, or Lotus, school, with those of the eight Buddhist schools prevalent in Japan at the time. Based on his comparison, he establishes that the Tendai school alone among them is capable of enabling all people to attain Buddhahood. Toki Jōnin was a samurai

and one of the first lay followers of Nichiren Shonin, taking faith in his teachings around 1254.

The “eight schools” of the title is a term that generally referred to the six schools of Buddhism predominant during the Nara period (710–794)—the Dharma Analysis Treasury, Establishment of Truth, Precepts, Dharma Characteristics, Three Treatises, and Flower Garland schools—and the two schools that rose to prominence during the Heian period (794–1185), the Tendai and True Word schools. In this writing, however, Nichiren is contrasting eight major Buddhist schools with the Tendai school. Therefore, the Tendai school is not included in the eight referred to here. In its place, Nichiren counts the Pure Land, or Nembutsu, school, which had only recently gained prominence.

In this work Nichiren compares the doctrines of these eight schools with those of the Tendai school—or, more specifically, with those of the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai. The Tendai (Chin T’ien-t’ai) school in Japan, founded by Dengyō, later veered from the teachings of T’ien-t’ai and Dengyō, as Nichiren points out in his writings. Thus when Nichiren refers in this work to the Tendai school, he means the teachings of T’ien-t’ai, Miao-lo, and Dengyō based on the Lotus Sutra, not the teachings accepted by the Tendai school of his day.

The focus of his comparison rests with each school’s view of the three bodies of the Buddha found in the sutras upon which those schools respectively rely. Sutras that do not teach the eternal nature of all three bodies—the Dharma body, the reward body, and the manifested body—are sutras that are not complete and final, he says. And he faults the eight schools for taking as their objects of devotion Buddhas that are incomplete, that are not eternally endowed with the three bodies. He then points out that the Flower Garland and True Word schools, which claim that their teachings include the principle of three thousand realms in a single moment of life, actually stole that doctrine from T’ien-t’ai’s teachings. In fact, their principal sutras, the Flower Garland and Mahāvairochana, do not include it, nor do they recognize the eternal nature of the Buddha’s three bodies. Hence they constitute no more than expedient means or provisional teachings that cannot enable one to attain Buddhahood, he concludes. He explains that the principle of three thousand realms in a single moment of life is a unique teaching found only in the Lotus Sutra, and that it was first clarified by T’ien-t’ai in his work *Great Concentration and Insight*.

Quoting that work, and Miao-lo’s commentary on it, Nichiren sheds light on the significance of the ten meditations and the ten objects of meditation, which constitute the main part of *Great Concentration and Insight*. Next he explains why T’ien-t’ai quotes the Flower Garland Sutra passage that reads, “The mind is like a skilled painter . . . there is not a single one [phenomenon] that is not created by the mind.” That passage, says Nichiren Shonin, is cited only to

support T'ien-t'ai's argument that the mind is endowed with all phenomena, not to assert as the Flower Garland school contends that the mind creates all phenomena. Nichiren closes by emphasizing that, if one wishes to understand the differences between the Tendai, or Lotus, school and the other Buddhist schools, one should carefully examine whether or not their basic sutras do in fact contain the principle of three thousand realms in a single moment of life and whether they recognize the eternal nature of the three bodies of the Buddha.

Notes

[1.](#) The words “the provisional” here refer to the transient aspect or identity of the Buddha. The Buddha of this identity is called “provisional Buddha” and is viewed as the Buddha of the manifested body.

[2. Lotus Sutra, chap. 3.](#) This and the following two passages constitute a verse in the same chapter.

[3.](#) Emperor Wu (r. 560–578) of the Northern Chou dynasty who persecuted Buddhism. This persecution is known as one of the four imperial persecutions of Buddhism in China.

[4.](#) This passage appears in the fourth volume of the extant edition of *The Annotations on “The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra.”*

[5.](#) *The Meaning of the Flower Garland Sutra Based on An Earlier Commentary*, one of Ch'eng-kuan's commentaries on the Flower Garland Sutra. This passage is found in the thirty-fifth volume of the extant edition of this work. For ten meditations, see Glossary.

[6.](#) This passage is found in the forty-fourth volume of the extant edition of *Meaning of the Flower Garland Sutra Based on an Earlier Commentary*. The words of the Lotus Sutra in this passage are from the “Expedient Means” (2nd) chapter.

[7.](#) The old translation refers to the sixty-volume Flower Garland Sutra translated by Buddhahadra (359–429), and the new translation refers to the eighty-volume Flower Garland Sutra by Shikshānanda (652–710). In the sixty-volume Flower Garland Sutra, these words are spoken not by Bodhisattva Forest of Merits but by Bodhisattva Thus Come One Forest. In the eighty-volume Flower Garland Sutra, these words are spoken by Bodhisattva Forest of Awakening.

[8. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.](#)

[9.](#) Ibid.

[10.](#) Major honored ones such as Mahāvairochana Buddha, Akshobhya Buddha, Amida Buddha, Bodhisattva Vajrasattva, and Bodhisattva Diamond King, who are depicted in the Diamond Realm mandala, an object of devotion in esoteric Buddhism.

[11.](#) This passage is not found in the Buddha Treasury Sutra, but a passage of similar content is found in the Matrix of the Thus Come One Sutra.

[12.](#) This commentary is a record made by I-hsing of the lectures Shan-wu-wei gave on the Mahāvairochana Sutra for Chin-kang-chih and Pu-k'ung.

[13.](#) This is described in the “Expedient Means” (2nd) chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

[14.](#) A system of meditation that is aimed at transcending desire and suffering and attaining unity with the supreme spirit or truth. Here yoga refers to the result (enlightenment) attained by this meditation. In esoteric Buddhism, it is taught that, through esoteric practices, the body, mouth, and mind of ordinary people are united with those of Mahāvairochana Buddha, thus enabling them to attain Buddhahood in their present form.

[15.](#) One of the basic doctrines of the Dharma Characteristics school. The first is existence produced by imagination or delusion. In this mode of existence, non-substantial things are regarded as substantial and become objects of attachment. The second is existence that arises from dependent origination. In this category, the phenomenal world is regarded as a product of dependent origination and has no independent or distinctive nature of its own. The third is existence as the ultimate truth. This refers to the true nature of all things, or the unchanging reality underlying all phenomena. The three modes of existence also refer to the conditions of the observer, because according to this doctrine, observer and observed are indistinguishable.

[16.](#) Kōbō, the founder of the Japanese True Word school, postulated the ten stages of the mind to determine the relative worth of the Buddhist teachings. In this system of classification, he placed “the mind that perceives the complete absence of self [intrinsic nature]” at the ninth stage, stating that it corresponded to the Flower Garland school.

[17.](#) This concept means that all things are produced by causal conditions. The ten similes refer to the ten phenomena arising from such conditions. The sutra lists these similes as a phantom, a heat shimmer, a dream, a reflection or shadow, a phantom city, an echo, the moon reflected in the water, floating bubbles, flowers in the sky, or a fire-wheel made by revolving a flare.

[18.](#) In the ten stages of the mind, “to understand one’s own mind as it truly is” is placed at the eighth stage, and corresponds to the Tendai School.

[19.](#) Mount Ch’ing-liang, another name for Mount Wu-t’ai.

[20.](#) “One-practice meditation” refers to constant sitting meditation, one of the four forms of meditation set forth by T’ien-t’ai. “One practice” means a practice in which one constantly engages in seated meditation without walking around a statue of the Buddha, standing, or lying.

[21.](#) “Thirty realms” refers to the ten factors multiplied by the three realms of existence (see Glossary).

[22.](#) A doctrine described in *The Treatise on the Establishment of Truth*, which regards all things as temporary and non-substantial, or, as without an independent and distinctive nature of their own. The first of the three aspects is that all things are temporary because they arise through their relationship with other beings or phenomena, that is, dependent origination. The second is that all things are temporary because they appear to exist in uninterrupted continuity but change moment by moment. The third is that all things are temporary because they can be grasped from the viewpoint of relativity and dualism.

[23.](#) The nature of the four kinds of mind is that the mind is self-produced, that is, born of itself; that it is produced by another; that it is produced by both these; and that it is produced by neither.

[24.](#) The Sanskrit word *sarvajnatā* here refers to the wisdom through which one begins to free oneself from illusions about the true nature of existence and awaken to the truth of the Middle Way.

[25.](#) The four views regarding existence and nonexistence are set forth in each of the four teachings, or four teachings of doctrine. The four views regarding existence and nonexistence, or four perceptions of reality, are four gates to enter the Buddhist truth. They are (1) the gate of being, (2) the gate of emptiness, (3) the gate of both being and emptiness, and (4) the gate of neither being nor emptiness. Thus there are the sixteen views in all of the four teachings.

[26.](#) “Persons” here refers to “meditation masters with their ignorance of correct doctrine” mentioned earlier.

[27.](#) [Lotus Sutra, chap. 16.](#)

[28.](#) This refers to Shakyamuni’s original attainment of enlightenment numberless major world system dust particle kalpas in the past, as described in chapter sixteen of the Lotus Sutra.

[29.](#) Chapter two of the Lotus Sutra describes the withdrawal of the five thousand arrogant persons, saying, “This assembly is now free of branches and leaves, made up only of those steadfast and truthful.”

[30.](#) “The great carriage” refers to the great white ox carriage described in the parable of the three carts and the burning house in chapter three of the Lotus Sutra, where it represents the one Buddha vehicle, or the supreme vehicle of Buddhahood.